23: Franck--288-289 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 291, 361, 576

"Every few [289] hours a cluster of jungle houses stood out in a tiny half-clearing on the high bank of the river, and most of these we visited. At each village the chief and the other men of importance, usually including several yellow-robed priests, came to pay their respects. Instead of snatching off hats or head-cloths, and performing an antic between a courtesy and an exaggerated bow, the form of salute in Luang Prabang is to come to a complete squat. Obsequious as this looked, it was evidently merely a gesture of politeness, for even the men of highest rank who had any intercourse with the prince, representative of the king in person, dropped to their haunches, and rose to human stature again only when the interview ended. In making any request of him, or in receiving anything from him, even the boatmen squatted, holding both hands, palms together, above the head. The village notables wore sampots of many colors--purple, pink, grass-green--topped by khaki coats of uniform cut, which they evidently donned in our honor. Always they brought us leaf-wrapped cones of flowers, usually on banana-leaf platters. A supply of these bouquets of greeting, one concluded, must be kept on hand for emergencies."

23; Franck--336 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 576, 622, 609 Ethnic subgroup

"Village chiefs bent low before the emissary of the king, putting their hands on their knees, for evidently this prince was not close enough to royalty to be worthy of the complete squat; or the people here may have been more independent. In turn the head-man of a village is a real boss-provided he has a very commanding way. This one of Ban-namon, otherwise known as Muong Kassy--ban seems to mean town, and a muong is a division something like the commune of France--did not have much head-man personality, or he had less respect or fear for princely orders than his attitude suggested; so that when I went for my daily conversation with my family I had also to wire back to the commissaire and insist on fresh horses, for none had been provided, the strict orders of the king and the French notwithstanding."

68: Mouhot--154 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 431, 576, 556, 609

"I am literally pillaged by these petty mandarins and chiefs of villages, [HD: in southern Luang Prabang province] and have to give away guns, sabres, lead, powder, colours, pencils, and even my paper; and then, after having received their presents, they will not put themselves out of their way to do me the smallest service. I would not wish my most deadly foe, if I had one, to undergo all the trouble and persecution of this kind which I have encountered."

68: Mouhot--268-269 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 123, 576, 609, 646

"No event could have caused more sensation here [HD: in Luang Prabang] than the arrival of 'the long-bearded stranger.' From the humblest to the greatest--for even here are distinctions of rank--every one [269] looks on a 'white' as a natural curiosity, and they are not yet satisfied with looking--nothing is talked of but the stranger. When I pass through the town in my white dress, to go to the market or to visit the pagodas or other interesting places, the people crowd round me, and look after me as long as they can catch a glimpse of me. Everywhere I go complete silence reigns, and I am treated as though I were a sovereign or prince, and the council, by order of the king, have given to me as to them power of life or death over his subjects. Poor people! why can I not raise you from the abasement into which you have fallen?"

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

403 electricians hugged each other, and, enchanted by the din, the
527 audience began to drift away from the theatre and make for the dancing floor.

527 The second attraction in order of popularity was a love-court. A
584 quadrangular arrangement of tables had been formed, covered by a
782 thatched roof raised on posts decorated with woven bamboo
793 representations of animals, weapons and phallic emblems. Seated round the tables in the interior of the square were the girls, and their suitors sat facing them. Between the couples had been placed offerings of food, brought by the girls. Originally a tribute to some ancient, forgotten fertility god, a primeval Thai Venus, the offerings would be given, next day, to the bonzes. All through the night the bantering of witticisms, the singing and the exchange of improvised verse would go on, accompanied by the accordion-like
[534] wheezings of the Kène, the Stone Age gourd pipes of Laos. Sometimes through a happy fault in the circuit the splutter and bellow of the loud-speakers would suddenly lapse, and you heard the beehive dronings of the communal love-making, the kènes, and the voice of the presiding bonze, preaching continually in an archaic, incomprehensible language from the wicker cage into which he had been fastened. The cage symbolized the protection of his religion from these earthly distractions. As soon as inspiration failed he would be relieved by the next on the rota of preachers, waiting now to take his place.

584 Love-courts are the accepted preliminary to the consummation of
[533] affairs of the heart, which – despite European conviction that
576 romantic love is a Western invention – are accompanied in Laos by much versifying and mild, self-imposed frustrations. When, for instance, a well-known beauty is wooed by a number of suitors, a serenading match may be arranged on the veranda of her house to permit her to test under competitive conditions the poetic and musical capabilities of each of them. Complete pre-marital freedom
[836] is recognized, but much outward reserve is maintained. There is a time and place for everything. It is incorrect, for example, to

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

acknowledge in the street a lady with whom one happens to be on particularly good terms. These things in Laos are fraught with an etiquette which is the legacy of a highly organized society not too far gone in decay.

The charm of Vientiane lies in the life and the customs of the people. Unless one is an amateur of pagoda architecture there is little else to be seen. The Laotians have preferred to work in wood, rather than stone, and their art, confined chiefly to the decoration by religious artists of the doors, pillars and interiors of pagodas, quickly perishes in such a climate.

Outside the town there is a great, grey, half-decayed *stupa*, built as a tomb for a hair of the Buddha. It is surrounded by a cloister, containing perhaps a thousand Buddha images; a collection of which the people of Vientiane are very proud. But even here, where the religion is practised in its purest form, there is a little degeneration, a little backsliding from the lofty philosophic conception; and the taint of magic practices shows itself. Selecting one of the numerous images as a personal tutelary divinity, the devotee subjects it to a kind of bribery similar to that sometimes practised in Southern Europe with images of the saints. In this case the image's chief function is healing, and when the sufferer recovers from any complaint he hastens to the pagoda to apply gold-leaf to the part of the Buddha corresponding to that where he has felt the pain in his own body. I was interested to deduce from this practice that the people of Vientiane are much plagued by headaches – perhaps those which accompany malaria.

Standing in a corner of the sanctuary was an ancient ithyphallic statue, an old Hindu divinity, no doubt, which had been worn smooth in the appropriate parts by the feminine adoration of a thousand years. I was told that the women of the French colony who wish for a child frequently emulate their husbands' pose of Laos-ization by coming here secretly to pay their respects. I wondered whether this clandestine tribute might not be extended

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

deserted the village paddy fields at our approach. Dupont told the 361
driver to wait behind as we went into the village. As a convert to 361
the Laotian way of life he paid much attention to local etiquette; 576
he said that we must on no account appear with arms. There were 784
no signs of life in the village and Dupont found this disconcerting. We must keep a careful look-out, he said, for a white thread across the path, or a cross decorated with red flowers. Either would mean that the village was taboo to strangers; in the first case because of a violent death or the presence of epidemic disease and in the second because the feast of the tutelary spirit was being celebrated. It was for reasons of these periodical taboos that Laotian villages, although built as near as possible to roads, were not actually on them. The places where we had stopped that day were not true Laotian villages at all, but military posts, around which a few store-keepers, mostly Chinese, had grouped themselves.

Although Dupont could find no signs of a definite taboo, he was 576
still very uneasy that no one had come out to greet us. The correct 784
thing on entering a Laotian village with the intention of staying the night was to ask for the headman and obtain his permission to do so. Unless this were done it would be a grave discourtesy to enter any house. Dupont emphasized that while the Laotians were tolerant, civilized and hospitable, there were certain indispensable forms, and as we mooched about the deserted village, he poured out information on the subject; even describing the position for correct sleeping; body stretched out at right angles to wall containing door, feet pointing to the door. When I suggested that we might find an empty hut and sleep in it, he was startled. Although the villagers might overlook minor breaches of custom, he said, this would be a grave one, involving them in an expensive purification ceremony before the hut could be occupied again.

I offered no more suggestions and in the end we found a rather 576
scared looking woman who said, when Dupont spoke to her in Laotian, that the headman was away, and was not expected back. It was quite clear now that we were not welcome, and Dupont said

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM 1 Indochina
Laotians AM 8

576 that perhaps it would be better, after all, not to sleep in the village. Thinking about this experience afterwards, I concluded that the villagers dared not welcome us in the usual way, being unable to guarantee our safety, with the Issarak bands and the Viet-Minh in the neighbourhood. I expected that Dupont would now resign himself and return to Vang Vieng, but he began to produce arguments for carrying on. The worst thing about the convoy, he said, was that it prevented our seeing so many things and doing so many things that we could otherwise do. Up in the mountains there were Meo villages, he said, and he badly wanted to get another Meo dog. They were rare and hard to come by, but he knew one of the Meo chiefs who would oblige him. Having found out that I was very ready to be interested in such things, Dupont produced this Meo village as a kind of gaudy enticement. The only thing that separated us from the leisurely enjoyment of such pleasures, was a single village, not more than three kilometres away, which, once passed, was the last until we reached the military post of Muong Kassy, fifty kilometres away, over the mountains. Dupont's final suggestion was that we should stay where we were until about an hour after dark, then creep up to the outskirts of the village – Pha Home was its name – with lights off, switch on the lights to make sure there was no barrier, and rush through it.

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At about 8.30, then, by which time Dupont was convinced that the village of Pha Home, with its Viet-Minh visitors, would be peacefully sleeping, we started off. It was difficult to approach the village quietly, as the road was uphill all the way. Dupont stopped and tried to quieten the exhaust, by squeezing the ends of the pipe together. This certainly reduced the exhaust note to a strangled snuffling, but through it sounded too plainly the miscellaneous rattlings that nothing could stop, and as soon as the headlights were switched off there was no way of avoiding the pot-holes and the small, loose boulders, over which we crashed continually. It was lucky for us that the village lay back about a hundred yards from the road. In spite of the hour, it was full of light and animation. As

facing: THE FANTASTIC LANDSCAPE OF NORTHERN LAOS

175* inhabitants and especially the songs and laughter of the beautiful
114 girls bedecked with flowers. . . . It nevertheless follows from his re-
/771 marks that Lan-Xang was then the veritable holy land of Buddhism
792/ and that it possessed the most highly venerated sanctuaries where priests from Siam and Cambodia "came to spend ten or twelve days to study and receive their grades."

439 For a long time now the rich traders of Holland had been sending
175* ships into the waters of the Indian Ocean in search of cloves, /106/ nutmeg, pepper, silk goods, gold dust and porcelain. In 1641 the mother country had made settlements in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, the Celebes and the Moluccas, and its flag was known as far as the seas of China and Japan. Several mercantile establishments had sent out "sub-traders" from Batavia to Siam and to Cambodia. In July 1641 the governor general of Java, Van Diemen, ordered a mission which was operating in Pnom-Penh on behalf of the East India Company to send out a caravan to "the land of gum lac and benzoin." Under the direction of Van Wustof and his assistants William de Gover and Hubert Boudewinsz, the caravan entered the Mekong. The voyage was a long and difficult one, and often dangerous where rapids had to be passed. These men left Phom-Penh on July 20 and reached Vientiane on November 3 after 106 days of effort. They brought a good-sized packet of cloth and cottonstuffs, a casket of emeralds set in rings and small gifts such as brightly colored sampots (?), mirrors which closed like a book, etc... (1).

1. Cf. Cabaton, Le Laos et les Neerlandais au dix-septieme siecle (1913).

A few kilometers out of Vientiane a /107/ messenger from the king came to find out what the foreigners' intentions were and was shown a letter from Van Diemen to the "sovereign of Laos." He was fully satisfied and took them to the outskirts of the city to dwellings which had been prepared for them on the banks of the river. On the following day, November 4, the merchandise and gifts were unloaded. On the 5th the Dutch were received by the king "a quarter of an hour's
/576/ march away from the capital." They knelt down most humbly, their feet bare, striking the ground three times with their foreheads and holding a large candle in each hand, and were welcomed in a tumultuous camp of soldiers, horses and elephants caparisoned with

"But in regard to the kingdom's laws, it is a certain fact that 671
there are very few of them, because, in my opinion, there is no 571
great need of any in order to live in accordance with the customs 626
of the land. The people are brought up to work, to have very little
to do with foreigners, not to undertake anything which might dis-
turb them and to live an idle and /115/ listless life although not
lacking any of the things necessary to preserve it. The king's will,
which does not greatly interfere with his people, takes the place
of a great many laws for them.... The manner in which the in-
habitants of the land live with one another is highly civil and
obliging. Unfriendliness and quarrels are banished... they all have
enough to live on and get along on, so that one does not hear of
thieves except as a thing quite out of the ordinary.... But the /565/
mandarins do not behave in the same way. Indeed, their insolence
and their insulting and criminal conduct dim the praise which the
common people merit on this account, because they abuse the
power which they have in the kingdom, and when they see some-
thing which pleases them... they act in such wise as to find means
for taking possession of it.

"But if we should now pass to the person of the king in order to 643*
describe him, there is no monarch, no matter how powerful, whom 174
he does not regard as beneath him, and it would indeed seem that 648
he affects not to yield in any particular to the emperors of China...
Only rarely does he appear in public... preferring to be worshiped
by his people as a hidden God rather than as a man like themselves
and of the same nature... He allows himself to be seen only twice
/116/ a year, for a period of three days, by his people, who re-
ceive this grace from their prince with such gratitude and joyous
sentiments that he forgets nothing on these occasions which might
contribute to their amusement. For this purpose there are several /527/
elephants which are trained to do a thousand little tricks and several wild
animals which are kept chained and made to fight... finally there
are wrestlers and gladiators and others, with their skirmishes which
last until last until evening and terminate all this rejoicing...

"Of all the prerogatives which he (the king) has, and which are 643*
a further mark of the extent of his power, that of having several 576
petty tributary kings in his dependency who come to his court to do
him homage and acknowledge him as their sovereign and who give
him superb presents, is by no means the least. He receives these
ambassadors in a great parlor seated on an extremely high throne
and garbed in his ceremonial robes, and replies to their civilities

643* through the mouth of his chancellor and never speaks to them ex-
576 cept through a go-between..."

643* A "Trojan War" in Tran-Ninh (1651-1652). Under the firm hand
648* of such a monarch, the vassals and tributary princes eagerly com-
175 plied with the slightest of their sovereign's orders. Great was the
584 astonishment, therefore, when it was learned in 1651 that Chao-Kham-Xan, king of Xieng-Khouang, whom Souligna had asked for the hand of his daughter Nang-Ken-Chan in marriage, had dared to reply that the princess was not free and that he declined the honor of this alliance. Enflamed by the accounts which had been given him of the beauty and wisdom of the "pearl" of Tran-Ninh, the king of Lan-Xang pretended not to notice the affront but gallantly persisted and sent a messenger to take rich gifts to the girl. In vain. Then Souligna sent for the princess manu militari. The detachment was brought to an abrupt halt by the troops of King Chao-Kham-Xan and had to retrace its steps, while the people of Xieng-Khouang foresaw the worst and hastily built a fortress at Pana to protect their capital.(1).

1. Cf. Captain de Pelacot, op. cit. /"Le Tran-Ninh historique." Revue indochinoise. Hanoi, 1896./

643* Souligna decided that a small army of two thousand men would
648* be enough to punish Chao-Kham-Xan for his insolence. This force
721 did in fact take the stronghold of Pana by surprise and penetrate into
175* Xieng-Khouang on a bridge /118/ thrown over the ramparts. The king, a prisoner in his own palace, had to give in. But although he surrendered to force he kept a stubborn rancor over this misadventure which was inherited by his son Chao-Kham-Lan who succeeded him in 1688. This prince raised a thousand difficulties in paying the traditional tribute to Lan-Xang, and friendly relations between the two sister states were ended for good and all. In the eighteenth century Xieng-Khouang was to be engaged in a permanent struggle with Souligna's successors, and in the nineteenth century Chao-Noi, a king of Tran-Ninh, was to deliver up the unfortunate king Anou, the last monarch of Vientiane, to Siam.

643* But let us not anticipate further on these events but rather re-
175* turn to the year 1652, when Lan-Xang was shining with all its splendor and when the minor expedition in Xieng-Khouang meant no more to its king than a simple demonstration of his power and his authority.

643 646 canton heads and heads of villages, who might be described as cantonal and municipal delegates, gather in the capital of the muong to vote on the names of candidates which are presented. The name of the one who obtains the most votes is then presented by the province administrator to the superior resident, who accepts or rejects him after studying his personal qualities, his aptitudes, his background, etc. In the case of a rejection the electors are consulted a second time. The superior resident names the four chiefs of muongs by delegation from the governor general. These latter may not begin office until they receive their commission, insignia and seal from the French government.

In general, the electors' choice falls on a son, brother or nephew of the high official who is to be replaced, unless he is unworthy or notoriously incapable.

635 647 Mandarins of lesser importance are named by the province head with the approval of the persons under his administration and of the superior resident.

641 652 Officials receive a salary only in the kingdom of Luang-Prabang and in the provinces of Vien-Tiane and Muong-Hou. Everywhere else they must be content with a fee equivalent to one-tenth of the sums they collect as taxes.

693 In their capacity as judges, the muong authorities also collect legal costs and shares in the sums of certain fines, as is the custom of the land.

647 576 Such, in its general outline, is the organization of the Laotian administration. It generally functions well, is sufficient to the needs of the natives and makes it possible for us, despite the vast extent of our possession, to keep only a few European officials there.

192 The outer forms of respect towards great men, mandarins and anyone who holds a rank are dictated by Laotian etiquette, as in Siam. One does not speak to a king, a [495] [Illustration] [496] [Blank page] [497] prince or a leader as one would to an equal or an inferior. There are special expressions which are peculiar to the representatives of certain social classes or to the holders of dignities. But even while it conserves, at bottom, the ritual ceremonial forms, Laotian etiquette is paternal and much more spontaneous and genuinely respectful than elsewhere.

When they speak to the king, to princes, to great men, etc., inferiors prostrate themselves, with forehead on clasped hands, near the ground, or with their hands clasped above their head. Outside of this particular case, those present may remain squatting, smoke, talk, laugh and even disturb the audience somewhat. Moreover, no lack

Whatsoever of respect is to be seen

/970/"Laotian Politeness in Ancient and Modern Times (1)"

1. A talk held on June 18, 1949, under the auspices of the Alliance Francaise in Vientiane.

121 An eminent lecturer has said that the Laotian is a humble person. I should like to add that the Laotian is also very polite. If I dared, I would use the past tense! But one should not let oneself be misled by the appearance of the newly arisen cities and the uncertain customs of a generation as yet poorly adjusted, where the old remember the past and where the young believe that much must be destroyed.

That is why the talk that I gave in Laotian on the subject had as much an informative character as an educational one, for I believe that in the era in which we find ourselves it is necessary to help people in making choices and in adjusting themselves. And since we, Frenchmen and Laotians, have been living side by side for more than half a century, we must, in some sort, have an interpretation of French and Laotian customs in order to be able to decide, now in favor of the former, now in favor of the latter.

576 What are the marks of respect?--To show his respect to a superior or to an older person, the Laotian salutes with his hands joined together. This manner of salutation must be preserved. The custom of going on all fours in approaching a mandarin will no longer do. It is, in effect, a humiliating posture. When one passes by a superior it is enough to walk softly while inclining the head a little.

The salute in the Laotian or in the French manner marks the respect of one person toward another. It must be reciprocal, but it is up to the subordinate to salute first.

/971/ When one person salutes another with his hands folded together, the latter must answer in the same manner. If he does not answer at all or only makes a sign with his head he must be considered ill-bred.

177 After having returned the greeting in the Laotian manner,
576 the superior can shake hands in the European manner in order to show his good will towards the person who respects him.

Some say that to salute in the European fashion is too liberal a

177 gesture, and others say that to salute the Laotian way sometimes
576 seems degrading because those whom one greets do not always return the greeting in the same manner, considering it as an homage which is their due but which does not need to be reciprocated.

The Laotian is polite, one must abide by that. The Laotian is respectful of tradition, one must abide by that even more emphatica But let us not forget that from now on all Laotians must have the sense of progress and the desire to improve themselves. Politeness must be neither a unilateral token of respect nor a mark of the humiliation of the human being.

554 To salute in the French manner the subordinate nods his head
576 after having taken off his hat if he is wearing one. If someone extends his hand to him, he shakes it. The superior is the first to hold out his hand. The woman is the first to hold her hand out to a man. To be polite one should shake hands somewhat forcefully. In order to do so one should always use one's right hand and never imitate certain Laotian peasants who, under the pretense of being acquainted with French customs, extend their hand from afar to Europeans while stretching out their left arm.

In the street.--When one meets a high personage in the street it is no longer necessary, as it used to be, to sit down in order to greet him. After having taken off one's hat one nods one's head. If one is not wearing a hat one is free to greet him either by joining one's hands together or by nodding one's head politely. If one is on a bicycle or on a horse, there is no need at all to dismount. The mere gesture of nodding one's head suffices. If one has something to say to a friend whom one meets, one should stand on the side of the street or of the pavement to conduct one's conversation. When one is on a bicycle one should dismount and should not leave one leg over the frame of the bicycle while one is chatting. If one is dealing with a colleague or an intimate friend, one may hail him using expressions like: "Sabay!" (good day), or "Pai sai ma?" (where are you coming from?): that is good tradition, which must always be preserved.

481 Laotians have the habit of walking in Indian file. This habit
576 should be abandoned because it is no longer good form. It will be well to practice the European custom of walking abreast of one another except in cases when this is a hindrance or on a path. When there are two people walking together, /972/ the superior places

481 himself at the right hand side. When there are three, the superior
576 walks in the middle. The same applies to travel in a conveyance. But when the group is very numerous, it is not possible for all to walk abreast. In that case the walkers divide themselves into several groups.

576 Habits and deportment. --The different habits of a person often attract the attention of the others. Our bad habits are immediately remarked by those who surround us; thus we become the laughing-stock of the whole community. Persons who expose themselves to ridicule and to mockery are the fools who make a display of their learning; people who wear glasses without being either near-sighted or farsighted or even without having anything wrong with their eyes; those who lower their hat to the right when the sun strikes their left temple; those who speak and while doing so always keep their pipe or a cigarette in their mouths; those who, while they speak or are walking, constantly keep their hands in the pockets of their trousers; those women whose sin is raised above their knees; and those who make themselves up and dress like actresses.

The habits which I have just described belong to persons who do not take the trouble of observing the behavior of well-bred people in order to follow their example. Those who, instead of observing other, prefer to keep their own bizarre habits are nok vong or nok soun persons (eccentrics).

I cannot, here, enumerate all types of correct behavior. You may consider as good behavior that which does not arouse the attention of others in an unfavorable way. A polite person is recognized by the fact that he talks softly, that he observes the hierarchy and by the fact that he always says: "Khop chai!" (thank you) and "Kho thot!" (pardon me). The politest terms for saying thank you are "Khop khoun!" and "Khop phadet phakhoun!" Well-bred people use these phrases every time they receive something or when someone has rendered them a service. They never forget to say: "Pathan thot!" or "Kho aphaythot!" (1) every time they make a slip in

1. Other terms of politeness used to excuse oneself.

speaking, when they pass in front of, or near, a person, when they are forced to pass through a door ahead of others or when they have

to get something which is above the head of someone else. A polite person realizes that it is very impolite to touch the head of another person, even that of his closest friend. To hit someone over the head with the mak kok is a very grave offense. The mak kok, which signifies olive, is a fist formed in such a manner that the middle finger sticks out beyond the other fingers. To point out an object with one's foot is the gesture of a very crude person. A polite person always avails himself of the index finger of his right hand to point out something to someone. 576 /826/

On a visit. --When one arrives at the house of a Laotian one walks very softly and greets in the Laotian manner. If the owner of the house /973/ extends his hand, one should greet him in the European manner. Once in the living room one must wait till one is told "Sit down" before sitting down. The polite person asks his guest to sit down immediately after the exchange of greetings. 574 576

When you enter the house of a European, never walk in stealthily the way you do with a Laotian. The European would think that you had come to stab him. You should walk in such a way that he can hear you, without, at the same time, stamping on the floor with all your strength because you would, in so doing, frighten the master of the house. Before entering, you must knock on the door quite forcefully; then you must wait till you are told: "Come in!" or till someone comes to open the door for you. The Laotian visitor does not dare knock on the door for fear of committing an impoliteness, but he coughs outside the door.

In the living room the master of the house has arranged all the furniture in a certain way. When you are invited to sit down, you should do so without moving the chair that is designated to you. If you are offered a cigarette, you may refuse politely if you do not not smoke. If you do smoke, you should accept it. You will notice that there are ash-trays in the room. Use them. Do not drop the ashes from your cigarette on the table, the chair or on the floor. /353/

To receive something from a superior, the polite Laotian extends his right hand supported by his left hand.

Visiting the sick. --When one of our acquaintances has fallen sick, we must inquire about him by paying him a visit. If one is prevented from doing so by something important, one can have a 734

734 friend take one's place.

Laotians when they pay a visit to a sick person, prattle noisily,
574 ask the sick person a great number of unnecessary questions, and
576 sometimes tell him stories to cheer him up. This custom must stop. The patient, who is tired, needs rest. The visit one pays him should not last longer than ten minutes.

574 Condolence visit.--The Laotian ceremony connected with
576 the condolence visit is the opposite of the Western ceremony. The
764 The visitor, instead of appearing sad before the family of the deceased, is gay and smiling.

In order to give you an idea of what goes on in a house in which a death has taken place among the Laotians, I shall content myself by citing here certain passages from my article, "The custom
764 of funeral ceremonies in the land of Laos" (1): "Those who believe
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1. In Kinnary, No. 4, November, 1946.

in the existence of the phi place a tray of food intended for the deceased near the coffin. Furthermore they place, at the head of the coffin, a sword marked with a cross with chalk, together with a superstitious formula in order to prevent the phi from stealing the coffin away from the deceased. The coffin has to be watched over day and night. The watchers talk, play certain games, or engage in any other diversion. /274/

/825/ "In the course of this watch cats are also prevented from prowling around the coffin. A cat which were to jump across would provoke the resurrection of the dead person, according to what certain people say.

"The house in which the person has died is called heuan di (happy house). There one works, sings, dances, and plays. From it can be heard the sound of orchestras and shouts of joy. Such spectacles have something disconcerting about them to the eyes of strangers. Nevertheless, one should not regard this behavior as a sign of irreverence towards the deceased person. Despite its smiling appearance, the family of the deceased suffers profoundly. It abstains from violent shedding of tears and from public lamentations because it considers a discreet grief more dignified and the sense one has of death in t[illegible]y a nobler one."

/779/ It would be difficult not to respect this tradition which stems

from the Buddhist religion; but there is reason, in my opinion, for 764
banishing all that is in the domain of superstition. 574

European custom, in contrast, permits the person in mourning 576
not to receive the visitor in the house of the deceased because he is
too afflicted. In this case the visitor leaves a card with a few words 000
of condolence.

If the person in mourning comes to receive the visitor, the latter should assume a sad air and he must not speak of the dead person first. This visit is paid out of sympathy for the family which is in mourning. It should not last too long because grief requires solitude.

Duties of the visitor. --On this subject I advise the adoption of the French custom:

The visitor dresses properly and in a correct manner. If he is wearing a coat and a hat, and carrying an umbrella and a cane, he puts them off before knocking on the door. He greets the lady and the master of the house before the other persons who are present. If the latter are too numerous he is not obligated to shake hands with everybody. It will be enough if he nods his head a couple of times to the right and to the left.

He takes his leave by shaking hands with the lady and the master of the house. In order to salute the other people present he performs the same movements as at his entry. If the number of people present is too large he may skillfully slip away; that is what is called loi vat angkit in Laotian ("to take French leave").

Duties of the host. --Here again my preference is for Western customs:

The host, when he sees his guests coming, appears before them to welcome them. After the exchange of greetings he designates the seats and invites everyone to sit down. When everybody is seated, somebody enters; he extends his hand and everybody rises to greet him. A lady does not get up to return the greeting except in the case of a personage of /975/ note or of a venerable old man.

The hostess and the host must appear affable and smiling during the whole time of the reception. When somebody takes his leave they accompany him to the door.

At a gathering. --At a gathering it is the duty of everyone to

000 indispensable for us to be acquainted with customs of our French friends. This is to prevent that in the course of a French-Laotian gathering we should be embarrassed in our actions and gestures. The French on their side should not be ignorant of our customs; a gesture of Laotian politeness might well be misinterpreted by those who are unacquainted with our customs, and that would be a regrettable misunderstanding.

How a Laotian Mandarin Should Behave.

647 A high Laotian functionary, in order to be worthy of his rank,
576 must have a different bearing depending on whether he finds himself in the exercise /977/ of his functions, among his family, or at private gatherings.

577 In the office. --In his office the mandarin behaves in an irre-
647 proachable fashion in order to show himself worthy of the functions that he holds. In this way he sets a good example to the officials who are under his authority. Before he reprimands one of his subordinates, he must have thought the matter over to get a clear idea of the effects that his reprimand may have. The man who has received the reprimand will not fail to answer, in effect, any unfounded criticism. If the head of a department hands out reprimands on every possible occasion, even for minimal matters, his staff will end up by being used to his unnecessary harangues. By this process one scarcely makes oneself obeyed and respected. In short, the mandarin should "turn his tongue seven times in his mouth" before speaking; he has a correct appearance and is concerned about his reputation and his honor.

593 In the family. --The mandarin must be a good father of his
647 family in the company of his wife and of his children. He facilitates
665 the household work entrusted to his wife, in place of picking quarrels with her from vain motives. Crude forms of expression may give rise to arguments. It is up to you, mandarin, to avoid them. It is possible that your wife may throw you into a fit of anger. In that case it is up to you to control yourself at the same time to try and appease your companion by consoling words. If one of the partners in a marriage is "fire," so goes a Laotian adage, the other must

The person whose absent spirits are to be recalled sits next to the pha khouan, on the other side of which is the achar master of ceremonies facing him. 775 782

In the case of a wedding, the bride and bridegroom each sits in front of his and her own pha khouan and achar, the young man being on the right of his affianced. [585]

Those present, consisting of aged persons, notables, relatives, friends and acquaintances, sit around mostly behind the interested parties.

While the candles are lighted, the achar commences to recite the prayer.

After the litanies are ended, the oldest and most respected of the assembly begins a series of the phouk khene (fixing a thread to the wrist) starting with the achar. The latter extends his forearm horizontally, either his right or his left, bent at right angles and held near the elbow by the hand of another person in the gathering. The opposite hand must be held in the attitude of prayer in front of the face as if it were joined to the hand on the other side. The man who will tie the knot then grasps the white cotton thread by the middle, so that the two halves hang down. These he draws over the wrist which is held in both directions of the axis of the arm, in order to sweep away the kho, that is, the misfortunes sent as a punishment for former sins. Then he detaches from the extremity of each thread a little piece which he throws towards the setting sun, thus throwing the kho afar. He then takes the khay khouan, a [51] pellet of rice, a banana, and finally one of the precious objects contained in the pha khouan. These he places in the extended open hand to serve as an offering to the khouan, and brings the small tray containing the khay khouan closer in such a way that the back of this hand is in contact with that of the chicken. Finally, after tying the thread around the wrist, he grasps the loops of the knot between the thumb and the forefinger, and rolls them together for about a second, giving him time to finish the formula of good wishes which he has been murmuring since the beginning while accomplishing the gestures described above.

The symbolical knot tied to the wrist serves to hold the khouan who have just been attracted to it, and prevents them from wandering away again. One can take advantage of the opportunity to "tie the wrist" of anyone present, either as a sign of friendship or of hommage. [576] At the close of the ceremony, which comes to an end without any more formalities, everyone is invited to a meal offered for the occasion.